

United States Senate

March 22, 2018

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

I write today in regards to an announcement made on February 6, 2018 by the Director of the National Exposure Research Laboratory within the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Research and Development informing employees of the decision to close its Las Vegas laboratory, located within leased space at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), at the end of September 2018, according to an email sent to staff.

Purportedly, the original plan had been to consolidate the laboratory's workspace after the UNLV lease expired in September 2020. This announcement would move up the plan by two years.

In addition, the EPA's Office of Administration and Resources Management (OARM), Las Vegas Human Resources Shared Service Center was also announced for closure. Reportedly, the human resources group, which occupies leased space in a neighboring building complex, had no advance knowledge their office would be closed until the announcement was made.

Recent news accounts on the announced closures say the decision leaves more than 50 employees in Nevada weighing relocation, retirement, or resignation.¹ Additional information indicates that 28 contractors would also be affected by the closures. Some of the scientists employed at the EPA laboratory are also adjunct professors at UNLV, leaving their relationship with the university in question.

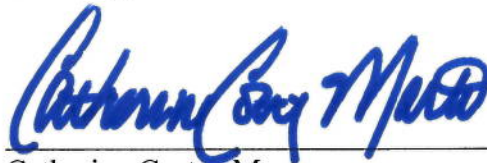
As you are well aware, several of my constituents now have many life-changing decisions to make in a short timeframe that not only effects them, but their families, other professional commitments, as well as the outcome of their ongoing research efforts. I urge you to give them the full support of your agency, and help provide them with certainty and specificity by answering the following questions:

¹ <https://federalnewsradio.com/agency-oversight/2018/02/epa-tells-las-vegas-employees-to-relocate-retire-or-resign/>

1. What was the evaluation used to determine the closure for this particular laboratory facility?
2. Why was the closure decision expedited to September 2018, rather than 2020?
3. What will happen to the research currently being done at this facility?
4. How will the agency accommodate employees that are unable to relocate? Will telework options be available to these employees?
5. What assistance is being provided to impacted employees?
6. What is the current status of the Office of Air and Radiation's Radiation and Indoor Environments National Laboratory which resides in a neighboring facility? Is this facility also under consideration for closure?
7. Section 104(e) of the Clean Water Act requires the EPA Administrator to establish, equip, and maintain field laboratory a research facility specifically in the "southwestern area" of the United States "for the conduct of research, investigations, experiments, field demonstrations and studies, and training relating to the prevention, reduction and elimination of pollution." Furthermore, each facility shall be "located near institutions of higher learning in which graduate training in such research might be carried out." What EPA facility in the southwest otherwise fits this criteria?

Thank you for your consideration of these matters of importance to my constituents. I kindly request a response to my inquiries by Thursday, April 12, 2018.

Sincerely,



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

MAY 22 2018

OFFICE OF
ADMINISTRATION
AND RESOURCES
MANAGEMENT

The Honorable Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cortez Masto:

Thank you for your March 22, 2018, letter to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding closures at EPA's Las Vegas facilities. The Administrator asked that I respond on his behalf.

Since 2012, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has released over 517 thousand square feet of office space nationwide resulting in cumulative annual rent avoidance of nearly \$20 million. The EPA is continuing to invest in reconfiguring workspace to align with current workforce levels and to reduce long-term rent costs consistent with the Federal Assets Sale and Transfer Act (FASTA) of 2016.

In 2012, the agency began discussing with Congress the future of the laboratory located in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Office of Research and Development (ORD) has had a leasing arrangement with the University of Las Vegas, Nevada for many years, allowing the EPA to rent laboratory and office space on the university campus. In 2014, the UNLV indicated they are not interested in continuing this arrangement. Accordingly, EPA began making preparation for an alternative location to continue this work in that same year.

The Office of Administration Resources and Management (OARM) conducts human resources transactional services currently through three Human Resources (HR) Shared Service Centers including Las Vegas. The centers in Cincinnati, Ohio and Research Triangle Park, North Carolina are in EPA-owned facilities. The HR shared service center in Las Vegas, Nevada, the smallest of the three, is in leased space.

Consistent with the FASTA, a decision was made that the work currently performed by OARM and ORD in Las Vegas, would transition to EPA-owned locations by September 30, 2018. This determination will ensure the agency continues to provide services in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Operations will continue in federally-owned space in other EPA locations and will reduce the EPA's overall operational costs moving forward. The EPA's human resources staff of 17 employees have been offered paid relocation to equivalent positions at the EPA's headquarters, Cincinnati or Research Triangle Park offices. Likewise, the agency's research personnel staff of 32 have been offered paid relocation to equivalent positions at Cincinnati, Ohio, Research

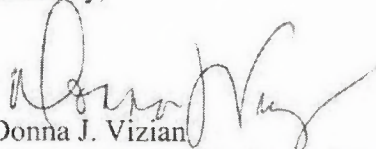
Triangle Park, North Carolina, Athens, Georgia or other ORD locations. The EPA also received approval by the Office of Personnel Management and the Office of Management and Budget of a Voluntary Early Retirement Authority and Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment package, funded from the FY 2017 Environmental Programs and Management Appropriations Account.

The current lease with the UNLV expires on September 30, 2020, but given the long history of laboratory work by the EPA and its predecessors, the EPA needs approximately two years to conduct the required sampling and clean-up activities needed to release the space back to the UNLV and to meet Nuclear Regulatory Commission decommissioning and license requirements.

The important research conducted at the Las Vegas location will continue at the agency's laboratories in Research Triangle Park North Carolina. Additionally, laboratory facilities in Colorado will ensure that the EPA meets the requirement of Section 104(e) of the Clean Water Act, which states that the EPA must have laboratory facilities in the southwestern area of the United States near institutions of higher learning.

We appreciate your continued support of these important priority areas. If you have further questions, please contact me or your staff may contact Christina Moody in EPA's Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations at Moody.christina@epa.gov or 202-564-0260.

Sincerely,



Donna J. Vizian
Principal Deputy Assistant Administrator